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ABSTRACT

This article presents a framework for using a variety of available supervision modalities, in relation to the Littrell's four stages of development of school counselors. Challenges in selecting and providing appropriate supervision to school counselors has been reported in the literature. Consistent with previous research, this review conceptualizes school counselor development as a life long task with identifiable characteristics at each stage. Several supervision modalities are reviewed and evaluated relative to four developmental stages. Suggestions for supervisor practices and further research are discussed. (Contains 25 references.) (Author)

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Supervision Modalities

Developmentally Appropriate for School Counselors

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Abstract

This article presented a framework for using a variety of available supervision modalities, in relation to the Littrell's four stages of development of school counselors. Challenges in selecting and providing appropriate supervision to school counselors has been reported in the literature. Consistent with previous research, this review conceptualized school counselor development as a life long task with identifiable characteristics at each stage. Several supervision modalities were reviewed and evaluated relative to four developmental stages. Suggestions for supervisor practices and further research were discussed.

Supervision Modalities

Developmentally Appropriate for School Counselors

Improved supervision is needed in school counseling. Many school counselors have been practicing with inadequate or without formal supervision (Barret & Schmidt, 1986; Carone, Hall & Grubb, 1998; Christman-Dunn & Rochelle, 1998; Crutchfield, Price, McGarity, Pennington, Richardson & Tsolis, 1997; Roberts & Borders, 1994). School counselor responsibilities have increased in the past several years' (e.g. mental health counseling, guidance counseling, curriculum development, and administrative duties). In addition, school counselors have routinely faced issues of violence, teen pregnancy, suicide, death, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, and domestic violence (Borders, 1991; Carone et. al., 1998; Christman-Dunn & Rochelle, 1998). These factors increase the need for appropriate supervision for the welfare of both the client and the school counselor.

Crutchfield et. al. (1997) reported that many of the skills needed to handle problems faced by school counselors may not be taught in their graduate training. School counselors may find themselves in situations where they have neither the skills nor the supervision resources available. In addition, there are many demands on the time of school counselors. ASCA recommended counselor to student ratio be no more than one counselor to 250 students (Cobia & Henderson, 2002). However, Carone et. al. (1998) found that 40% of the school counselors identified working with student to counselor ratios ranging from 500 to 1148. This dynamic creates a need for school counselors to maximize their time to meet

the needs of a growing number of students, while providing increased amounts of clinical services. This combination of increased responsibility without appropriate supervision has produced negative results including increased stress (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997), increased ethical violations (Henderson, 1994), decreased clinical skills (Crutchfield et. al., 1997) and relinquished professional responsibilities (Magnuson, Norem & Bradley, 2001).

Many school counselors recognize the importance and desired continued supervision (McMahon & Patton, 2001; Page, Pietrzak & Sutton, 2001; Roberts and Borders, 1994). However, Page et. al. (2001) found that the majority of school counselors in a national study did not receive clinical supervision. Barrett and Schmidt (1986) highlighted the need for an increase in alternative approaches to supervision. Roberts and Borders (1994) encouraged counselor educators to find innovative ways to provide supervision. In response, a number of different supervision modalities of school counselors have been proposed.

The benefits school counselors receive from supervision during practicum and internship do not end with completion of the graduate program. Professional development continues beyond graduation and into the professional career and life span of the counselor (Barret & Schmidt, 1986; Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992). The supervision needs of the school counselor changes as the individual matures, consequently, supervision interventions have been found to be more effective if they address the developmental needs of the school counselor (Whiting et. al., 2001). However, few articles have identified the developmental level appropriate for various supervision modalities. This article suggests the use

of various supervision modalities at various developmental stages of school counselors.

A review of the literature indicates that the developmental models have many similarities (Littrell et. al. 1979; Nelson & Johnson, 1999; Skovholt and Ronnestad, 1992; Stoltenberg, 1981; Witting, Bradley and Planny, 1999). The supervision modalities currently available to school counselors will be discussed in relation to the characteristics that seem most appropriate to use with school counselors in four different stages of development based upon Littrell et. al. (1979). The stages will be labeled dependent, pseudo-dependent, interdependence, and independence.

Stage 1: Dependence

Stage one of the counselor development model is labeled the dependent stage because counselors rely upon the supervisor to provide direction for their activities. This stage of counselor development is encountered most often by individuals during their practicum or internship. Littrell et. al. (1979) defined the first developmental stage as a period of time that the school counselor desires relationship building, goal setting, and clarification of expectations. In line with these findings, Stoltenberg (1981) emphasized that the counselor desires dependence and reliance on directives provided by the supervisor, and a supportive and structured environment. In addition, the first stage is characterized by feelings of anxiety and a desire to develop clinical skill and approaches for leading the client to accomplishing their goals (Witting et. al., 2001).

Several supervision modalities that appear to be appropriate at this stage included structured supervision led by a trained supervisor. Drapela and Drapela (1986) provided a model for structured supervision that was person-oriented, issue-oriented and behavior-oriented. This leads the supervisor to focus on the counselor trainee, the issue of the client, and a specific behavioral response that the counselor trainee can utilize. This type of feedback provides the necessary personal support as well as providing specific examples of behaviors that the counselor trainee can use with clients. In addition, group supervision was identified as most effective when it focuses on positive skill development (Crutchfield et. al., 1997). Although, the participants in the study were current school counselors and most likely beyond stage one developmental level. They valued concrete feedback. This suggests the necessity for such feedback to school counselors who are new to the profession. An integrated model of supervision for individual interns developed by Nelson and Johnson (1999) described the process of orientation as clarifying supervisor's expectations and tasks. This model uses a highly structured approach to create clear parameter for the responsibilities of the counselor trainee. In a study by Roberts and Borders (1994), they found that the least experienced counselors identified the most beneficial supervision task included learning specific counseling skills. Providing concrete and structured feedback is a critical need for counselor trainees at stage one. Usher and Borders (1993) demonstrated through their research that school counselor trainees preferred a task oriented directed style of supervision focusing on skill development. Although, the supervision modalities are in context of practicum

and internship, many interns may not move from the first stage to the second stage of development. Many school counselors may require continued support and structure in their supervision during their professional career (Nelson & Johnson, 1999).

Stage Two: Pseudo-Dependence

Stage two of counselor development model is labeled the pseudo-dependent stage because counselors desire to become independent from the supervisor by yet desire to have the supervisor available to provide direction for their activities. Stoltenberg (1981) found the second developmental level characterized as dependence upon the supervisor, while attempting to become autonomous. Counselors at struggled to practice with perceived weaknesses and handle transference issues (Witting et. al., 2001). This developmental level can be described as a period of time when the school counselor becomes primarily aware of deficits and strengths (Littrell et. al., 1979). Page et. al. (2001) conducted a national survey of credentialed school counselors and found that the two main goals of supervision were to choose appropriate interventions and develop skills and techniques. It is at stage two that counselors understand their deficits and seek to remediate.

Several supervision modalities that provide periodic clinical group supervision led by a trained supervisor were found to have mixed results with school counselors. Myrick and Sabella (1995) suggested using group supervision through the internet and e-mail because it provided autonomy and independence, and it was an on-going group experience to answer specific questions. Limitations

to this approach included distain for typing and lack of non-verbal communication from the supervisor (Myrick & Sabella, 1995). Another modality, long-term clinical supervision program, was used in a three year period of supervision of school counselors in the Virginia School System (Agnew, Vaught, Getz & Fortune, 2000). The positive impact on the participants included increased professionalism, skill growth and peer support. The problems identified included lack of adequate supervision time, reinforcement of techniques, and lack of constructive criticism (Agnew et. al., 2000). This model may have met the needs of the school counselors if it increased the structure and time allotted for supervision. This reinforces the opinion that school counselor desire additional supervision time and recognition on the need to improve their skills. Another supervision modality that appears beneficial to counselors at the second level of development was the Northside Independent School District (NISD) model. The NISD model provides a supervisor and a highly structured format for supervision of five separate supervision conferences, preobservation, observation, data anaylsis, postobservation, and analysis of postobservation (Henderson & Lampe, 1992). The benefits identified by participants included valuing feedback regarding counseling skills, learning new techniques, and receiving support from other professionals (Henderson & Lampe, 1992).

Stage 3: Interdependence

Stage three of counselor development model is labeled the interdependence stage because counselors desire to work consultatively with other as an equal professional. Concerns expressed by counselors at the third level of

development include professional development and personal identity (Whiting et. al., 2001), and a desire to be independent of a supervisor (Littrell et. al., 1979). The Transition stage as labeled by Nelson & Johnson (1999) is characterized by increased confidence, independence and decreased supervisor role. At this stage the supervisor takes a role as a consultant dependent upon the deficits in skill (e.g. cultural competence or developmentally appropriate materials) expressed by the counselor (Nelson & Johnson, 1999).

Peer group supervision modality appears to be most appropriate at the third stage of counselor development. In a study by Crutchfield & Borders (1997) results from peer groups with a trained supervisor reported feedback on skills and techniques to be most beneficial, however peer groups without trained supervisor reported collegial support to be the most helpful. Benshoff & Paisley (1996) initiated the Structured Peer Consultation Model for School Counselors. The participants reported that the involvement in the program assisted them in developing consultation skills, counseling skills, and support. A number of participants in the program expressed a desire for increased critique and challenge of their skills, while others disagreed on the benefit of the structured environment (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996). Although the majority of participants in their study had between five to ten years of experience, this disagreement was significant as is highlights the different needs for school counselors may not depend upon the years of experience.

An example of a model that appeared inappropriate with beginning school counselor, but maybe beneficial with school counselors at the third stage of

development was the Mentoring project for first year school counselors. Within this model, school counselors were given phone numbers of other school counselors and were encouraged to call them with any questions (VanZandt & Perry, 1992). This model provided school counselors with large amounts of freedom to work independently and only consult as necessary. The challenges of peer supervision in this model were identified by first year school counselors that some sessions became unstructured and participants received lack of feedback (Christman-Dunn & Rochelle, 1998). This may have frustrated school counselors who were in stage one or two of development. An additional problem found was that unstructured sessions occasionally resulted in a session that involved complaining (Crutchfield, 1997). What was viewed as complaining and potentially damaging to the field of school counseling was identified as a valuable process for collegial bonding by another.

Crutchfield and Borders (1997) found that peer supervision produced an environment to receive support from others and slightly increased job satisfaction, counseling effectiveness, or self-confidence; however it did not significantly increase skill development. Consequently, peer supervision may not be as beneficial for beginning developmental levels as other available supervision modalities. School counselors practicing at the third level of development who desired support and feedback from colleagues may have found this modality to be useful.

Stage 4: Independence

Stage four of the counselor development model is labeled the independent stage because counselors are fully capable of working independently of other school counselors. Stoltenberg (1981) defined a counselor practicing in the highest level of development as one who recognizes their unique abilities and differences when compared to other counselors. Although, structured supervision experience was not expressed as critical at this developmental level, he advised that counselors need to have insight to consult when necessary (Stoltenberg, 1981). Littrel et. al. (1979) also viewed a counselor who self-supervised as practicing in the final level of development. This level of development or integration stage involved the ability to work independently and competently using self-supervision, peer supervision or continuing education (Nelson and Johnson, 1999).

Unfortunately, school counselors who choose not continue with supervision, but depend upon self supervision encounter problems of diminished accountability for improving skills (Borders, 1991) and have a decreased priority for regular self evaluation (Peace & Sprinthall, 1998). Currently, many school counselors are supervised by individuals who may have limited understanding of the importance of increased clinical skill development and may discourage investing time or money in clinical supervision (Bunch, 2002; Carone et. al., 1998; Schmidt, 1990). In a study conducted in the state of Kentucky, Carone et. al. (1998) found that only 2% of the supervisors of school counselors were counselors, while others were supervised by administrators or other professionals. This creates a problem for school counselor because it may deny them of specific

feedback on skills and techniques, collegial support, and the lack of connection with the school counseling profession.

Two modalities that may be appropriate at this stage include an evaluation tool used by school administrators in Missouri and the informal peer support network. The state of Missouri in conjunction with counselor educators, school counselors, and administrators developed the Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation System (Bunch, 2002). Benefits of the Performance-Based Professional School Counselor Evaluation System included a tool for dialogue between the administrator and the school counselor and a periodic intentional self-evaluation instrument (Bunch, 2002). The tool provided a periodic self-evaluation and an opportunity for self-reflection as to the need for improved professional development.

Summary

Although utilizing any supervision modality would provide greater benefit to school counselors than receiving no supervision, literature review suggests that effectiveness of supervision modalities depends upon the developmental level. It may be beneficial for a supervisor who has been given the responsibility of developing a supervision program for school counselors to recognize the subjective needs relative to the school counselor. The concerns identified by participants in Agnew (2000) long-term clinical supervision model ranged from a highly skilled counselor stating that they were not given the needed feedback to a less skilled clinician not given the needed supervision on basic skills. This highlights the notion that the supervision modality may have been an appropriate

fit for school counselors at the second level of development, but was too unstructured for beginning practitioners and did not provide the intensive feedback desired for more advanced practitioners. This suggests that supervisors need to meet the needs of the specific school counselor, rather than attempting to provide a blanket supervision modality for all school counselors.

Stoltenberg (1981) found the most important task of supervision is to choose a style of supervision that is beneficial to the development of a counselor. This suggests that as supervisors we have a responsibility to recognize the developmental level of the counselor and provide supervision accordingly. In addition to developmental levels, Crutchfield (1997) provided evidence that environmental factors such as time to pursue supervision, funding available, or administration's support should be considered when deciding upon a supervision modality.

While this review was limited in providing a comprehensive review of all supervision modalities or developmental levels, it provides important implications for supervisory decisions. Counselor educators have the opportunity to become involved in the supervision process for school counselors and it is beneficial for administrators of supervision programs to choose a modality which supports the level of development of the school counselor (Nelson & Johnson, 1999). Counselor educators have the opportunity to research, training, and implement a variety of supervision modalities.

Direction for further research includes the need for the continued exploration of the relationship between the supervision modality and

developmental level of school counselors. In addition, examining the developmental level of school counselors would assist in identifying the appropriate supervision modality to use with the school counselor. Supervision provides many benefits for school counselors (Borders, 1991; Henderson & Lampe, 1992; Roberts and Borders, 1994; Sutton & Page, 1994). Consequently, to continue to research effectiveness of supervision relative to development level of school counselors would be beneficial.

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